

WORKFORCE OBSERVATIONS FOR WEST CENTRAL WISCONSIN COUNTIES

APRIL 2003



State of Wisconsin
Department of Workforce Development

Signs of spring in local unemployment rates

There was no increase in the Eau Claire seasonally adjusted unemployment rate in March. The unemployment rate remained at 5.0 percent, the same rate it has been since January. Estimates released last week by the Department of Workforce Development showed that the State of Wisconsin unemployment rate declined in March to 5.3 percent from 5.5 percent in February. The national unemployment rate, however, remained at 5.8 percent in March.

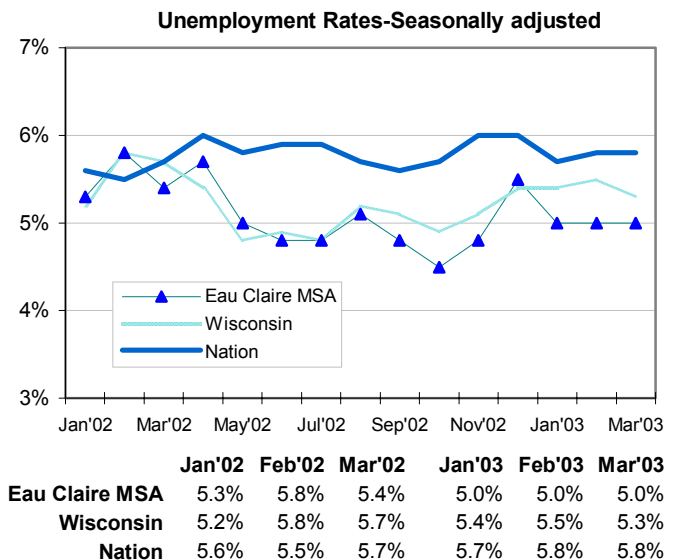
The Eau Claire-Chippewa metropolitan statistical area (MSA) unemployment rate remains lower than both state and national rates in March. It has been lower than the national rate for the previous twelve months and lower than the state rate in all but three of those months. The local MSA unemployment rate is also lower than rates in Janesville, Kenosha, Milwaukee, and Racine. Unemployment in these areas, as well as in Eau Claire, reflects the impact of employment reductions primarily from manufacturing firms.

Not too many months ago many economics were forecasting that by spring the economy would start to rebound, now those predictions are being extended to later this year. Locally, many workers will return to seasonal jobs this spring, but as of mid-March those numbers remain small.

Some of the rural counties of the West Central region did experience an increase in seasonal jobs and unemployment declined. Labor force estimates that are not adjusted to reduce the impact of typical seasonal fluctuations reflected lower unemployment rates in Pepin, Polk, and Barron counties in March. The not adjusted unemployment rate in Chippewa County also declined while the Eau Claire and Dunn county rates were unchanged.

Typically, the unemployment rates in February and March are the highest of the year. This is true for most of the counties in the state not just those in West Central Wisconsin. It is the time of year when employment in construction, retail trade, recreation, parks and forestry, restaurants, and manufacturing is at its lowest levels. As the weather warms, workers will return to construction projects, greenhouses and landscaping firms, golf courses, and city and county parks.

Even though many counties in the state suffer from the seasonal loss of jobs and have higher unemployment rates in late winter, the counties in the West Central are especially vulnerable to the changes in weather. A point demonstrated by the fact that every county in the region except Eau Claire had an unem-



Civilian Labor Force Estimates, not seasonally adjusted, for West Central Wisconsin counties

	Barron			Chippewa			Clark			Dunn			Eau Claire Co.		
	Mar '03	Feb '03	Mar '02	Mar '03	Feb '03	Mar '02	Mar '03	Feb '03	Mar '02	Mar '03	Feb '03	Mar '02	Mar '03	Feb '03	Mar '02
Civilian labor force	25,413	25,463	24,509	32,919	32,960	31,895	16,566	16,235	16,212	23,804	23,591	23,093	55,301	55,322	53,277
Employed	23,277	23,094	22,509	30,045	30,075	28,809	14,825	14,549	14,309	22,196	21,997	21,575	52,415	52,468	50,259
Unemployed	2,136	2,369	2,000	2,874	2,885	3,086	1,741	1,686	1,903	1,608	1,594	1,518	2,886	2,854	3,018
% unemployed	8.4	9.3	8.2	8.7	8.8	9.7	10.5	10.4	11.7	6.8	6.8	6.6	5.2	5.2	5.7
	Pepin			Pierce			Polk			St. Croix			West Central region		
	Mar '03	Feb '03	Mar '02	Mar '03	Feb '03	Mar '02	Mar '03	Feb '03	Mar '02	Mar '03	Feb '03	Mar '02	Mar '03	Feb '03	Mar '02
Civilian labor force	3,435	3,287	3,242	21,719	21,764	21,293	24,662	24,602	23,879	38,581	38,675	37,863	242,400	241,899	235,263
Employed	3,150	3,010	2,937	20,251	20,317	19,911	22,338	22,245	21,469	35,105	35,219	34,514	223,602	222,974	216,292
Unemployed	285	277	305	1,468	1,447	1,382	2,324	2,357	2,410	3,476	3,456	3,349	18,798	18,925	18,971
% unemployed	8.3	8.4	9.4	6.8	6.6	6.5	9.4	9.6	10.1	9.0	8.9	8.8	7.8	7.8	8.1

* not seasonally adjusted

Industry Employment Estimate: Current month - March 2003

(Employment in thousands)	Barron			Clark			Dunn			Pepin		
	Mar '03	Feb '03	Mar '02	Mar '03	Feb '03	Mar '02	Mar '03	Feb '03	Mar '02	Mar '03	Feb '03	Mar '02
Total Nonfarm	21.5	21.4	21.2	9.8	9.7	9.6	15.9	15.7	15.7	2.3	2.2	2.1
Const/Min'g/Nat. Resources	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.1	0.1	0.1
Manufacturing	6.3	6.3	6.4	2.6	2.6	2.7	2.1	2.1	2.1	0.2	0.2	0.2
Trade	3.4	3.4	3.6	1.4	1.4	1.3	2.4	2.4	2.3	0.5	0.4	0.5
Transportation & Utilities	0.4	0.4	0.5	0.4	0.4	0.4	1.7	1.7	1.7	0.0	0.1	0.1
Financial Activities	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.1	0.1	0.1
Education & Health Services	2.3	2.3	2.2	1.1	1.1	1.1	1.3	1.3	1.3	0.3	0.3	0.3
Leisure & Hospitality	1.7	1.7	1.6	0.7	0.7	0.6	1.5	1.5	1.5	0.3	0.2	0.2
Info/Prof. & Bus.Serv./Other	1.6	1.6	1.5	0.6	0.6	0.6	1.2	1.3	1.3	0.2	0.2	0.2
Total Government	4.8	4.8	4.5	2.2	2.1	2.2	4.7	4.5	4.7	0.6	0.6	0.6
	Pierce			Polk			St. Croix			Eau Claire MSA		
	Mar '03	Feb '03	Mar '02	Mar '03	Feb '03	Mar '02	Mar '03	Feb '03	Mar '02	Mar '03	Feb '03	Mar '02
Total Nonfarm	10.5	10.4	10.3	14.9	14.8	14.6	26.4	26.0	26.1	76.7	77.0	74.8
Const/Min'g/Nat. Resources	0.5	0.4	0.4	0.7	0.7	0.6	1.5	1.3	1.4	2.5	2.5	2.3
Manufacturing	0.8	0.8	0.8	3.7	3.7	3.8	5.6	5.6	6.0	11.0	11.1	11.1
Trade	1.2	1.2	1.1	2.0	1.9	2.1	4.2	4.2	4.2	12.7	12.6	12.6
Transportation & Utilities	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.3	0.3	0.3	1.0	0.9	1.0	2.8	2.8	2.6
Financial Activities	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.6	0.6	0.5	1.0	1.0	0.9	3.7	3.7	3.6
Education & Health Services	1.1	1.1	1.0	2.1	2.0	2.0	2.8	2.8	2.8	12.4	12.3	11.9
Leisure & Hospitality	1.3	1.2	1.2	1.3	1.4	1.3	3.2	3.1	2.9	7.0	7.0	6.9
Information/Prof. & Bus.Serv.	1.1	1.0	1.1	1.4	1.4	1.4	3.4	3.4	3.3	7.8	7.8	7.7
Other Services	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	3.8	3.7	3.7
Total Government	3.8	3.8	3.8	2.8	2.8	2.7	3.8	3.7	3.8	13.0	13.5	12.4

Current month preliminary. Estimates based on March 2002 benchmark. Summing from unrounded numbers.

ployment rate higher than the state unadjusted unemployment rate in March of 6.5 percent.

Unemployment rates increased over the month in 25 counties in the state including Clark, Pierce and St. Croix. However, these three plus Barron County were among only eighteen counties in the state that had higher unemployment rates than one year ago. The highest unemployment rate in the region, and 22nd highest in the state, was in St. Croix County with 9.0 percent unemployed. This is considerably higher than the unemployment rate of 3.7 percent from in March 2000. The increase includes the residents laid off not only from employers in the county but also from employers in Minnesota. (According to census data over 43 percent of the workers who live in St. Croix County work in Minnesota.)

The number of St. Croix County residents who complete a new claim for unemployment benefits has subsided, but the number who file continued weekly claims for benefits is 170 greater than last year in March and 350 greater than in March 2000. Nearly one-third of those claims is from workers laid off from manufacturing firms and that is reflected in the reduction in manufacturing employment in the county from 6,000 one year ago to 5,600 this March.

Continued weekly claims for unemployment com-

pensation benefits are also higher than one year ago in Barron and Dunn counties, yet the total number of jobs in these counties is higher. That happens as employers, especially those in the services sector, add workers as other employers, especially in manufacturing layoff workers. It is the old conundrum of laid off workers not possessing the skills to fill the new vacancies. Plus, workers who work but earn less than the amount of their unemployment check are eligible for partial unemployment benefits.

The total number of jobs in the region was greater than one year ago and more than in February. Employers in the nine-county area provided 177,900 jobs in March compared with 177,100 in February. Employers in construction and leisure and hospitality in most of the region added workers in March.

Some optimism remains that this economic trough will end soon but so far there is no real impetus to sustain an increase in demand for workers. Now, this area is facing another large reduction in workforce at the Northern Center and layoff notices were mailed in the last few weeks. While some of these workers will transfer to other state jobs or find work in area health facilities, many more will be out of a job and begin searching for different employment.

Look for the most current Labor Market Information at: WWW.DWD.STATE.WI.US/LMI

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